PUBLIC INTEREST RECORD

Hastings District Council:

Unelected Voting Rights on Standing Committees

14 August 2026

1. Purpose

This note records a continuing practice at Hastings District Council of appointing unelected iwi / mana whenua representatives with full voting rights to standing committees, and places that practice against the public claim by the Local Government Minister in June 2026 that the law would be changed to end it.

It is provided solely as a dated public-interest record.

2. Statements by Councillor Steve Gibson

On 14 August 2026, Hastings District Councillor Steve Gibson stated in a broadcast interview that:

- In the preceding week the council had approved a wastewater committee structured as five elected members and five unelected iwi representatives.
- The council was that day considering the appointment of an unelected iwi representative with full voting rights onto every major standing committee, including Strategy and Policy, Performance and Monitoring, Risk and Assurance, Community and Civic Futures, and Infrastructure Delivery.
- These appointees receive meeting fees.
- He has consistently opposed the practice and is usually supported by only one other councillor (Simon Nixon).
- He regards the arrangement as unfair because elected members must campaign and face voters while the appointed representatives do not.

Gibson has previously opposed mana whenua appointments with voting rights on other forums, including a water-related structure, and has been in the minority on those votes.

3. Ministerial Announcement – June 2026

On 2 June 2026, Local Government Minister Simon Watts announced that the government would amend the Local Government Act 2002 (via the Local Government (System Improvements) Bill) so that only elected members would hold voting rights on council committees.

The Minister stated that having unelected people on committees undermined decision-making and diluted the influence of elected members. He specifically referenced examples in the Far North, Tauranga and Hastings where iwi representatives (and in some cases people under 18) had been given voting rights without being elected.

The announced change provides that non-elected appointees may still sit on committees in an advisory capacity, but will not have voting rights and will not count toward quorum.

Councils were to be given six months after the bill’s passage to implement the change. As of mid-August 2026 the legislative process was not complete and the change was not yet fully in force.

4. Continuity of Practice at Hastings

Hastings District Council already operates the Heretaunga Takoto Noa Māori Standing Committee (HTNMSC), which includes appointed mana whenua members. Appointees from that committee sit on other standing committees of council.

Public council documents list HTNMSC appointees as members of Strategy & Policy, Performance & Monitoring, Risk & Assurance and related bodies.

Councillor Gibson’s statements indicate that further expansion of unelected voting rights onto additional standing committees was under active consideration in August 2026, after the Minister’s announcement and while the legislative change remained incomplete.

5. The Core Accountability Issue

The central point raised by Gibson (and earlier by Far North councillor Davina Smolders) is structural rather than personal:

- Elected members obtain their seats and voting rights through a public election process and remain accountable to voters.
- Appointed representatives obtain equivalent voting rights on the same committees without that process.
- Where those committees deal with strategy, infrastructure, risk, performance and delivery, the practical effect is that non-elected appointees hold formal decision-making influence over ratepayer-funded functions.

The Minister's June 2026 announcement accepted that this arrangement diluted democratic accountability. The continuing appointments at Hastings while the law change remains incomplete keep the issue live.

6. Purpose of This Record

This note exists to place on the public record, with a clear date, the statements made by an elected councillor about ongoing appointments of unelected voting members, and the gap between those appointments and the Minister's public commitment to end the practice.

It makes no allegation of illegality under current law. It records the factual and democratic-accountability issues as they stood in mid-August 2026.

Independent researcher
14 August 2026